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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KIGALI 000862

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RW](#)
SUBJECT: GETTING TO KNOW SOCIALIST PARTY LEADER
JEAN-BAPTISTE RUCIBIGANGO

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Classified By: Ambassador W. Stuart Symington for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The president of the Rwandan Socialist Party, an intellectual and Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) veteran whose family was killed during Rwanda's political violence of the late 1950s, is strongly pro-American and critical of China. He leads a small party which is aligned with the RPF, and espouses equal distribution of wealth, justice, a significant state role in the economy, and the provision of social services. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Poloff met November 30 with Rwandan Socialist Party (PSR) president Jean-Baptiste Rucibigango at the latter's house, which is on a small compound at the end of a pitted dirt road and is modestly furnished. He drives an older-model Mercedes that is in poor mechanical condition, and noted with pride that Rwanda's chief of defense, Gen. James Kabarebe, was a neighbor and lived in similarly modest accommodations.

¶3. (C) Rucibigango said his party's aims were to ensure equitable distribution of wealth, justice for all, and a social safety net including health and pensions. A parliamentarian who serves on the foreign affairs committee, he also spoke at length about Rwanda's relations with the United States and other countries. He is very pro-U.S. and pro-UK, saying "the Anglo-Saxons were the only ones who never killed any Rwandans," and spoke favorably of the British colonial practice of indirect rule. Rucibigango said Africans were very appreciative that President Obama was in the White House, and praised President Bush for providing large amounts of USG assistance in combating HIV/AIDS and malaria. The U.S. economy, with its recent increases in state involvement and spending, was close to an ideal economy, and the USG needed to devote greater USG attention and resources for Africa in general and Rwanda in particular, in part to ward off the threat from al-Qaeda and other Muslim extremists. The U.S. should send more Peace Corps volunteers, offer more scholarships and exchanges, promote more English-language teaching, and both countries should consider creating a Rwanda-America friendship society. He was supportive of AFRICOM, and thought it would be "good" if the U.S. were to station four to ten thousand troops in sub-Saharan Africa, provided they were not armed with nuclear weapons.

¶4. (C) In contrast, China's economy was "exploitative," Africans had greater cultural differences with Asians than with the West (virtually no Chinese married Rwandans, whereas many Westerners had married Rwandans), and the Chinese Embassy in 2004 had refused to meet with Rucibigango and the PSR. As for Europeans, Rwanda had had a long experience of

European intervention and colonialism, and much preferred the New World over the Old World, especially France and Belgium. The latter had distorted and deformed Rwandan society beginning in the 1920s, creating artificial ethnic divisions where none had existed ("my family became Hutu and then Tutsi at different times," according to colonial authorities' definitions) and continuing through independence in 1962. Rucibigango noted that his grandfather had respected Kaiser Wilhelm II's Germany, however.

15. (C) Discussing Rwanda's current situation, Rucibigango said Western-style democracy was a good way to share power, but noted that it took centuries to develop in the West, Qbut noted that it took centuries to develop in the West, among populations that were relatively well-educated. Democracy needs to be adapted to local realities, he continued, explaining that it would take generations for there to be reconciliation and acceptance in Rwanda, because it was difficult to change the mentality and thinking of adults. Rwanda's goal was to emulate the United States in becoming a "melting pot" and forging national unity. "If you can do it with hundreds of groups, we should be able to do it with three."

16. (C) Describing his past, Rucibigango said he was born in Rwanda in 1953 but fled to Burundi in 1959 after his family was "decimated" during massacres of Tutsis at that time. He has little memory of his parents, and keeps a photograph of his older sister (who died in 1959) displayed in his living room at home. Rucibigango won a scholarship to study under the Jesuits in Burundi, as had education minister Charles Murigande and Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) secretary-general Francois Ngarambe, and first became politically active in 1968. Bujumbura was a hotbed and a base for many revolutionaries at that time; "I used to wave Mao's Little

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Red Book," he added. He joined the Rwanda Patriotic Front full time in 1991, serving from 1991-1993 in north and northwestern Rwanda as a broadcaster and propagandist with the RPF's Radio Muhabura. Rucibigango was clearly proud of his wartime service and the RPF's discipline and organization (in marked contrast with Laurent Kabila's movement in the DRC). Many comrades died for the cause, but it was worthy, and before any action, RPF commanders consulted with their troops. During the war, countries from around the world-including Kenya, China, France and then-Zaire, either sent forces to Rwanda to fight against the RPF or provided other support to the former government. During this time, the USG was ignorant, not malignant, he said, and made the mistake of relying on France and Belgium for advice about Rwanda.

17. (C) Rucibigango was on a mission within territory held by the then-government when the genocide began in 1994, and after the RPF's victory, spent 1994-96 building national radio and television stations back up from scratch. In 1996-97, he served as a communications officer with Laurent Kabila's rebel movement in the DRC. He joined the PSR during the late 1990s or early 2000s, when it was having leadership problems, and was elected to parliament three times, most recently in 2008 and 2003, and is currently serving as the president of the Political Party Forum (a position that rotates among political parties). Rucibigango is widowed with three kids ranging in age between 15 and 18. He speaks French and some English, and has written several books and essays.

18. (C) Note: The PSR was created in 1992 by Dr. Medard Rutijanwa and Jean-Baptiste Mberabahizi. Mberabahizi was a member of parliament but left Rwanda in 1996, claiming to have serious disagreements with the RPF-led government. He is currently the secretary-general and spokesman for the FDU-Inkingi, an umbrella organization which consists of several exile political groups and which is headed by opposition figure Victoire, herself a declared candidate for

the 2010 presidential elections. Rutijanwa is still in Rwanda but is no longer a party member. During parliamentary elections in 2008, the PSR fielded candidates as part of an RPF-led coalition, winning one seat (held by Rucibigango). The PSR announced recently that it will not field a candidate for the upcoming presidential elections, but within the past several weeks it has conducted at least two grassroots meetings in districts outside of Kigali. End Note.

19. (C) COMMENT: Incongruous as it may seem given his background as an avowed socialist, former liberation fighter and admirer of Che Guevara (whose picture hangs on the wall at Rucibigango's home and was featured prominently at a recent PSR meeting), Rucibigango is a very staunch supporter of the United States and closer bilateral relations. As a party, the PSR is one of the smaller ones and appears to be closely aligned with the RPF--Ombudsman and senior RPF figure Tito Rutaremara delivered remarks at the PSR's general assembly meeting last month--but Rucibigango's independent personality suggests he is no one's stooge. His recent appointment as Political Party Forum president (a rotating position) puts him in a position to influence both the GOR and the newer political parties as Rwanda prepares for presidential elections next summer. END COMMENT.
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SYMINGTON